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THE BOOK REPORT

Francis Gary Powers Tries
to Set U-2 Record StraightBY ROBERT KIRSCH
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A scapegoat is one made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place. Francis Gary Powers came back from 21 months imprisonment in Russia to find he had been made the scapegoat in the C-2 incident.

"A HERO OR A MAN WHO FAILED IN HIS MISSION?" read one typical headline. Among the questions asked: "Why, knowing that neither he nor the U-2 should fall into unfriendly hands, didn't he blow himself up and the plane?"

"Why didn't Powers use the poison needle he had on hand? Or the pistol he had with him?"

Powers wanted to tell his side of the story, but the CIA made it clear that it didn't approve the idea. So for nearly a decade, Powers remained silent, accepted slurs and snubs, though he knew that there were answers which would have made his position far more comprehensible to the public.

Stayed Silent

Now, finally, we have his account of the most celebrated espionage incident of the Cold War, OPERATION OVERFLIGHT (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; \$6.95; illustrated), written with Curt Gentry.

It was easy for armchair Nathan Hales to cast Powers in the role of tainted mercenary or incomplete

patriot or symbol of declining American character. In a situation in which an American President made the unprecedented admission that he had authorized the overflight espionage, in which official explanations were revealed as lies before the entire world, the fact that Powers had survived made him a natural scapegoat.

Yet, in this complete and, as I read it, honest narrative, answers are given which put a different light on the case. Powers and the other U-2 pilots were never really prepared for capture by the Russians. The only instructions they had were: "You might as well tell them everything, because they are going to get it out of you anyway."

Powers, using his own judgment in the situation, went through 61 days of interrogation by the KGB and a show trial with a defense attorney who was obviously cooperating with his prosecutors, told them nothing more than they could find from the physical evidence of the wrecked plane, and indeed, withheld all vital information about the capabilities of U-2, previous overflights, CIA agents, other pilots, bases and equipment. What is more he tried to get a warning through to the agency about the altitude capabilities of the Russian rocket which exploded near his plane over Sverdlovsk.

Destruct Device

The destruct device, which he tried to set off (and a special CIA investigation supported his contention), was inadequate to destroy the plane. Carrying the poison needle was optional and at no time did his instructions include suicide to avoid capture.

His use of the words "deeply repentant and profoundly sorry" at his trial were held against him by the American public, but it is clear that this was the only defense allowed him under Soviet law.

His personal bitterness is that the CIA could have, with no threat to security, set the record straight by

revealing his instructions. But they did not do so. Yet, they not only paid off his contract, but rehired him on his return. And, thereafter, he went to work for Lockheed as a U-2 test pilot. But he suffered in other ways. The Air Force reneged on its promise to reinstate him, with full credit for the time served as a U-2 pilot. President Kennedy snubbed him. And he was forced to live in the shadow zone of public distrust.

A Real Man

Powers, by his own words, impresses the reader as a thoughtful if somewhat drab person. Of his capability as a pilot, there is no question. He was no more a mercenary

than any of those who volunteered for this hazardous mission. He felt, and feels today, that the espionage overflights were important and helped this country in the period of the Cold War.

In his account of his own life, his marital difficulties, his experiences in Soviet prison, we gain the impression of a real man behind the mythical character.

His most telling point is that we do not appear to have learned very much from the U-2 incident, particularly in view of the Pueblo affair where once again adequate means for emergency destruction of equipment and film were not made available.

There are questions raised here, the source of the credibility gap, the preparation of pilots for the possibility of capture, even whether or not Lee Harvey Oswald may have revealed information on the U-2 (available to him as a radar operator in Japan) to the Russians. But most of all, there is a fascinating story, effectively told.

Kirsch, Robert
CIA 104 Powers, Francis
CIA 402 U-2
SOC 401.2 Operation
Overflight